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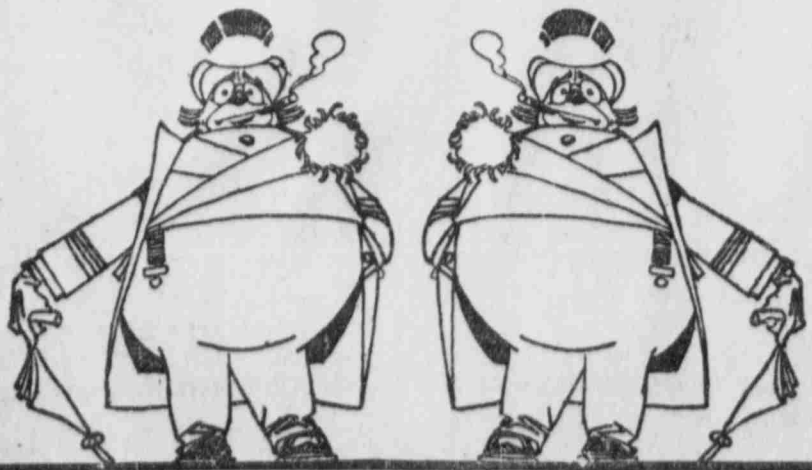
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This newspaper is published for people who want to know. HOW ABOUT YOU? ARE YOU A SUBSCRIBER?

## "BACK TO THE FARM"

V.—Social Life in the Country.

By C. V. GREGORY.

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THE social life and amusements of the country are essentially different from those in the city. I have heard people say that there is no such thing as social life in the country, but inquiry disclosed the fact that they never had spent much time in a modern, wide awake farm community. The foundation of all social life is in the home. It is in the country that the home is developed to the highest extent, and it necessarily follows that it is in the country that the strongest basis for a healthy social life exists.

The social life of the so called "society" people of the city does not exist in the country, and it is a blessing to the country that it does not. Such a social life is unnatural. Social life is primarily for amusement, recreation and development. Where is the amusement or the recreation in the struggle for social recognition by a clique whom a turn of the wheel of fortune has brought upmost? Where is the development unless it be the development of heartaches on the part of the wife and poverty on the part of the husband? Such a society, where people are measured by their money rather than by their true worth, is snobbery rather than social life.

Outside the "society" circles the social life of the city consists largely of amusements—Coney Island and its imitations, theaters and public dances. Some of these things are all right in their way. They furnish amusement and recreation. But they do not furnish development.

Here is where the great advantage of country social life comes in. It is not furnished ready made to those who have the price. Social diversions in the country are made to order. That is the reason why some people do not like them, and that is why a person who once really gets into the spirit of country social life is never afterward satisfied with social affairs in which he cannot have an active part.

The social possibilities of the country are not taken advantage of in all com-



FARMERS' PICNIC DINNER ON THE GRASS.

munities. It is true. In too many places each family is content to live by itself, with as little intercourse as possible with the neighbors. It is such communities that contribute most largely to the downward flow of population. With the general waking up of the farming districts is coming a broadening of social life. In some places the local church is the social center, but too often there are some members who consider so harmless a thing as an ice cream supper to help pay the preacher a sin. As a result the importance of the church as a social factor is not what it should be.

The most important centers of social life in the country are farmers' organizations of various kinds. Probably the most important of these, because the most extensive, is the grange. The grange has been in existence for forty-four years and numbers at present more than 1,000,000 members. In those communities where it has obtained a strong hold it is very effective in bringing the people together. In the older states a grange neighborhood can be told by the looks of the farms and buildings.

The plan of the local grange is to hold meetings at regular intervals, usually once a week in the winter and sometimes as infrequently as once a month in the summer. Generally these meetings are held at the home of one of the members. The whole family belongs. As a rule, there is a literary program in connection with the meeting, where the boys and girls learn to talk in public. Part of the program is devoted to agricultural topics, as one of the objects of the grange is education in farming. There is always enough amusement mixed in, however, to keep the children interested. In the winter the meetings begin in the afternoon, and the men look over the stock and talk over their problems while the children play and the women "visit."

In addition to the grange, there are many local farmers' clubs that are

doing a great deal to bring their members together socially. The only reason that there are not more such organizations is the lack of some one to take the lead. The cities have so long been drawing the best blood from some rural communities that in many places there is precious little left to build upon. With the changing conditions that are restoring the farm to a leading place in our national life there will be no lack of leaders, and the time will come when every community will have its club or grange.

In the Mississippi valley states, where industrial co-operation has obtained a strong foothold, co-operative picnics are one of the principal diversions. These are big affairs, including all the people for miles around. There are speeches and amusements and plenty to eat, and every one goes home happy.

A number of country towns and rural communities have a "field day" once or twice a year, which is in the nature of a big picnic, at which athletic contests predominate.

Local Fourth of July celebrations give the country boys a chance to work off their patriotism for a week in advance in helping to get things ready, and they enjoy the day a great deal more than they would a ready made celebration in a big town, where all they could do would be to stand on the side lines and shout. The best part of these affairs is that they develop originality and initiative on the part of the young people. It teaches them to develop any latent ability for leadership which they may possess. The boy who can get together nine farmer boys on Saturday afternoons and organize them into a ball team that can win from the neighboring township is the one who is going to be able to do things when he gets older. It is no small task to make an effective team out of nine boys when eight of them want to pitch and the other couldn't catch a ball to save his life.

It is the farm boys of today who will be foremost in the agricultural communities of tomorrow. One of the most important of the social factors affecting farm life is a boys' club. Nebraska has a well developed system of boys' and girls' corn clubs. There are a few in Iowa and Illinois, and more are being organized. The members of these clubs each have their plot of corn. They meet around from place to place, get better acquainted with one another and study corn growing. Often an experienced corn grower meets with them and gives them some practical lessons. In some cases these clubs are under the supervision of the agricultural college, which sends out letters of instruction to the boys every two weeks or so. In the winter a corn contest is held at the agricultural college. Some of the counties have local contests. There are prizes for the best corn and for the best corn judging. Often the boys who do the best work at the local contests have their expenses paid to the state contest at the agricultural college. Similar contests in cooking and sewing are held for the girls. Work of this kind is an inspiration to the boys and girls. They begin to see some of the real enjoyment of farm life.

This work is being extended to the boys of the cities by means of summer camps, where the boys are taken for a vacation, at the same time getting instruction and object lessons in agriculture. Many a boy who otherwise would have spent his life in town working for somebody else is thus started on the way to become an independent farmer.

Another big factor in rural social life is the country literary society. This reaches more people than a grange or a club can reach. Its disadvantage is that the membership is so large that only a few can appear on the programs. But a great many can listen, and they eagerly avail themselves of the opportunity. The country literary society when rightly managed combines both the social and the educational features and is a great uplift to the community.

Along with these other social factors come the local lecture courses. The talent is not always the best, but usually it is surprisingly good. Then there are ice cream suppers, picnics and fishing excursions in the summer and oyster suppers in the winter. The women often have a ladies' aid society, where they can meet and sew and visit to their hearts' content. The men have a fraternal order or two, where they can get together on Saturday evening. During the last few years the Y. M. C. A. has been extending to the country and doing a great deal of good work. Often clubrooms and a gymnasium are established, where the neighborhood boys can meet and try their athletic skill. Where such rooms have taken the place of the grocery store as an evening meeting place for the boys and young men there is a noticeable improvement in the community.

During vacations, when the young people are home from school, there is no lack of social diversions that appeal especially to them. There is just as much culture among these modern young people of the country as there is among the same classes in the city and much more whole heartedness. The country dances and parties are well conducted affairs and the occasion of much harmless fun. An occasional trip to town to attend the theater by way of the trolley line or in automobiles or in a big sleigh gives variety to the amusements.

Taking all these factors together, the social life found in the most highly developed country communities is superior in almost every way to that found in the cities. The development of this wholesome social life and its more general extension throughout the country will be important factors in turning the tide of population countryward.

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